

Settling the Southeast

by Chris Benevich



If you grew up in another area of the United States, you may have some ideas about life in the Southeast. Maybe you know the tune to “Dixie,” or you’ve heard about the dialect of English known as Gullah, originating with and spoken by African-Americans on an island off the coast. Before you move, we’ve chosen some popular and lesser-known highlights to introduce you to your new homeland.

Alabama

Did you know that Alabama was where the Civil Rights Movement began? You can pay homage to those who changed our country forever by passing through Birmingham, Selma and Tuskegee. Here, brave souls challenged segregation law, eventually bringing full access to public spaces and the right for all to vote. In Montgomery (the capital of Alabama), in 1955, Rosa Parks, an African-American woman, did not give up her seat on a city bus to a caucasian man, causing her to be arrested. Today, the Rosa Parks Museum in town brings you back into this time of her life through interactive exhibits, teaching you about the Montgomery bus boycotts.

Music legend Hank Williams was country’s first superstar, selling 10 million records in the late 40s and early 50s. Known for his hits like “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry” and “Hey, Good Lookin’,” he was born in Mount Olive, Ala., in 1923. A number of sites along the Hank Williams Trail in part preserve his memory, such as the Mount Olive West Baptist Church, where his mother played the organ, and where he sang. For an all-encompassing understanding of his early life, visit the Hank Williams, Sr. Boyhood Home & Museum in Georgiana. Or, circle back to Montgomery for the Hank Williams Museum and, one mile away, his grave site at Oakwood Cemetery.

2007, the Year of Alabama Arts, is a great year to start a new life in this state. The Alabama Bureau of Tourism & Travel organized a far-reaching and diverse set of folk, literary, performing and visual arts. Mind your p’s and q’s from pottery to quilting during this fun event with traditional museums, outdoor sculpture and more to explore.



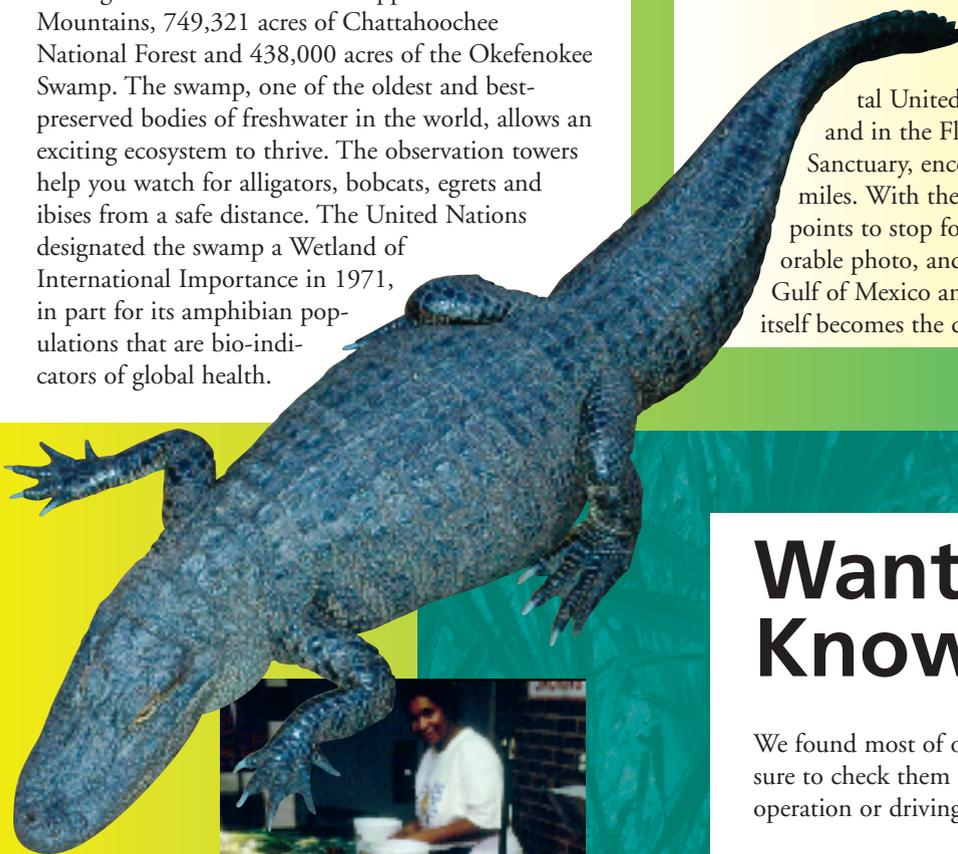


Florida

There's more than fun in Florida, but certainly you can't go wrong with entertainment options in this state. Many of the theme parks you longed to attend as a child hold court in Florida — Walt Disney World, Busch Gardens, Universal Orlando and the Kennedy Space Center. For something more off-the-beaten-path, check out Weeki Wachee Springs. Esther Williams, the famous water ballet performer, was filmed here. The park became known as Mermaid City because of its unique underwater performances. The swimmers breathe through hoses beneath the water's surface. To splash some color into your day, visit the Art Deco Historic District of Miami Beach. This square mile contains perhaps the most Art Deco buildings in the world. This area, with its architectural style that saw its heyday in the 1930s, became the place to play at the beach and live on the edge. From Miami, head towards the 106.5 miles of the Florida Keys Scenic Highway from Key Largo to Key West, where you just can't get any farther south in the continental United States. Along the way, marvel at and in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, encompassing 2,800 square nautical miles. With the highway's 43 bridges, countless points to stop for a snorkeling excursion or memorable photo, and the surrounding waters of the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean, the journey itself becomes the destination.

Georgia

In gorgeous Georgia, begin your visit in the past. Fantastic views abound along the Antebellum Trail from Macon to Athens in the halls of the restored homes and grounds. Historic battlefields, arsenals and museums all have stories to tell about the changes wrought by the Civil War and its aftermath. If your family enjoys the outdoors, you'll have no shortage of adventure with the Appalachian Mountains, 749,321 acres of Chattahoochee National Forest and 438,000 acres of the Okefenokee Swamp. The swamp, one of the oldest and best-preserved bodies of freshwater in the world, allows an exciting ecosystem to thrive. The observation towers help you watch for alligators, bobcats, egrets and ibises from a safe distance. The United Nations designated the swamp a Wetland of International Importance in 1971, in part for its amphibian populations that are bio-indicators of global health.



Want to Know More?

We found most of our tips on the following websites. Be sure to check them out for details, such as hours of operation or driving directions.

<http://800alabama.com>

<http://visitflorida.com>

<http://weekiwachee.com>

<http://www.fws.gov/refuges/profiles/index.cfm?id=41590>

<http://www.georgia.org>

<http://www.hankwilliamstrail.com>